

**TEXT OF THE  
2<sup>ND</sup> ANNUAL STATE OF THE DISTRICT ADDRESS**

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WINCHESTER SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT**

March 11, 2008

Members of the Board of Education,  
Guests,  
Members of the Winchester School Staff, and  
Members of the Community of Winchester:

This is the second time that I am having the opportunity to give this annual report as your school superintendent. My purpose is not only to outline the work that has been done over the past year, and to give my impression of how it has met or not met my expectations, but also to outline the work that I believe needs to be accomplished as we move toward the vision statement and my expectation that we can be the "Lighthouse School District of Northwestern Connecticut".

One of the charges that a new superintendent accepts is that he/she must become acquainted with the culture present in his/her new community, and then work with that community to strengthen or change that culture. Changes must become so much a part of the operation of the schools and the work ethic that they will be sustained after he or she leaves the post. Organizational research clearly states that sustainable change takes at least three and one-half to five years to implement. When I recall the review of the Kennedy administration soon after his assassination, everyone was talking about his first thousand days. As I come before you tonight, on this 590<sup>th</sup> day, I am happy to report that positive change is taking place, that most of the changes have lived up to my hopes, and that we still have much to do. I continue to believe that our vision is attainable, although, a little of my boyish enthusiasm has been muted.

I am committed to the belief that our schools are not the private fiefdom of the Board of Education or of the school superintendent. We

use the town's facilities, we depend upon the people of the town for financial support, and we receive the children we teach from their first teachers, their parents. The Board of Education, the Administrative team, the instructional and non-instructional staff, and I know an awful lot about our jobs, but we do not have the corner on the market on how to achieve our Vision.

If we believe that the schools belong to the community as defined in its broadest sense, then our efforts to reach out to its members and to convince them our sincerity must be our prime directive. Over the past year, we have seen growth in the numbers of citizens who are willing to participate in the important work of running our schools. We have completed a second round of Citizens Budget Advisory Committees, we have instituted an opportunity for parent leaders to voice ideas and concerns through the formation of a Parent Advisory Group, and we have begun the process of gathering input in the formulation of district goals through a Goals Review Process. Where there are congruent interests, we work with members of the Town Government. Individuals who ask questions or even those who take positions that may not be a part of our thinking or plans are welcomed, and respectfully responded to.

I have often said that no one idea is so perfect that it cannot be improved and that no idea or suggestion is so flawed that nothing can be learned or borrowed from it. We continue to bend our work to achieve the highest level of that statement's implementation. I don't know if we can ever be at the 100% level, but we will continue to work in that direction. I continue to believe that we have improved our relationship with the media. We have nothing to hide and we couldn't hide anything if we tried. We are honest and open in our interactions with the media and we are welcoming. Although the immediate impact of a story or of research may not be what we want to see, hear, or read, the media helps us to do our jobs better by pointing out our successes, our failures, our problems, and our plans. The media informs our community without taking sides. I appreciate their work.

All of the above having been said, what else should we be doing? We have to make better use of technology. Our web page is rarely current and not user friendly. We do not have an emergency information system in place that can alert parents of issues related to incidents in schools. My communication with the members of the Board of Education, "The Pipeline", has faltered because there are not enough hands to create the document. Our staff are often the last to know about what's happening in the district and/or the community. Often they hear about our intent to involve them in the district's initiatives at the last moment. All of the above must be addressed.

Our staff is the backbone of our work. Without their willingness to dig in and get the job done, no matter the hardships, I would have inherited a much weaker school system. Quality people are hesitant to apply for positions here. Some leave because of their own choosing. Others are asked to leave. On my first day, the most senior administrator was completing his fourth year, there was no curriculum coordinator, our business manager was interim, we were contracting for the services of a director of special education, there were too few non-certified people to do the work, our newly hired and our non-tenured instructional staff were annually receiving termination notice by April 1<sup>st</sup>. Grievances were being filed on a regular basis and the membership of the Board of Education was constantly being turned over. Little existed in the way of updated policy and there was little or no administrative memory.

All of this has changed in a very short period of time. With stability within the staff and the Board of Education, we are hard at work redefining ourselves and our mission. We are rebuilding lost communication links. Policies are being reviewed and rewritten. Handbooks are being edited or created. Practices are being stabilized. Although we have to reach further to attract the brightest and best at rates of pay that are among the lowest in the state, quality people are joining our drive to excellence. There have been virtually no grievances filed in the past year and regular meetings between administrators and staff are improving communication. With the additional ECS money that we received from the state, with the

cooperation of the Board of Selectmen who did not redirect any of these funds to other than educational purposes, and with the passage of a budget early enough in the year to allow us to hire from the top of the barrel, we have made significant progress.

Where do we go from here. We must develop a table of organization review and redefine job descriptions, strengthen our program of evaluation, provide regular in-service to staff members and, finally, order and re-order the system, adding and redirecting positions so that we are operating at ever increasing levels of efficiency. Our buildings are old and getting older. The nature of the students coming to us from the community presents greater challenges. If the goal is to educate all who come to us, those who think we can do with less are not realistic. At best, we can only hope to control the increases that must come.

This is an excellent segue into the next topic. A school superintendent cannot begin to exercise the role of educational leader unless a firm budgetary and financial foundation is in place. Over the past four to five years, Winchester has had four business managers. Each has his own style and each made changes in the process, believing that the system would be improved. Add to this the fact that both the office of the superintendent and the makeup of the Board of Education were in flux, and you have the potential for disaster. I am pleased to report that we now have an experienced school business manager in place and an assistant business manager who has allowed her role to be expanded well beyond what the former assistant did. In spite of John Torok's illness this year, we have been able to deconstruct and construct the budget for the current school year at a level that documents every item of expense and expenditure. This information was the basis upon which the projected budget was formulated.

The \$300,000 reduction to this year's budget, some cost over-runs in transportation and special education, and several unanticipated maintenance projects have forced me to impose a spending freeze very early in the year. Many of the items that were a part of this year's budget have either been cut or are on hold. They may not be able to

be realized. Textbook purchases and in-service programs are among the areas currently placed on hold. Much planning was done with former town leaders to improve the infrastructure of our school buildings. That plan was shelved and we are working in cooperation with new town leaders. The OCR requirements at Pearson are being addressed. More work in other buildings is being planned. Our current proposed budget includes verified amounts for actual maintenance work projects that will be accomplished next year. I am urging all members of the community across all political lines to support this crucial work. As we go forward, we will continue to develop dexterity with Phoenix, our accounting program, we will place all special education students on contracts so that there is a traceable paper trail on services and expenditures, we are looking into bidding the provision of natural gas and electrical service to see if cost savings can be effected. We are looking at our transportation contractor to see how we can provide service needs that arise without going to other higher cost contractors and we are applying for and better monitoring, grants to lessen our dependence on local residents.

Finally, I come to instruction and student achievement. Although we have performed well over the past year, we have a long way to go before people are tearing down the Town's gate to get into our schools. We now have a strong language program at the middle school and we have started to provide foreign language instruction at the elementary level. We have a librarian in place to help move media centers to the heart of our instructional programs. We have begun to build learning communities in each of our schools so that data is informing instruction and best teacher practices are being shared among our staff. We have an involved and informed Board of Education Curriculum Committee in place. We have a Curriculum Council of teacher leaders, building administrators, and our curriculum coordinator meeting and planning on a regular basis. We have revised the math program, the middle school language arts program, and the science program so that they are aligned with state curriculum frameworks. We are moving toward the adoption of a new social studies program. Our efforts include working with members of the Gilbert staff so that our pre-kindergarten to grade 12 instruction is

seamless. We have modified and will continue to modify the daily schedule at the middle school so that each required area of instruction will receive adequate time to accomplish student achievement goals. We have begun to provide areas of enrichment for our students.

Where do we go from here? We must make every reasonable effort to constantly improve student achievement and foster a love of learning. More individualized instruction based on valid data and more sharing among our staff is an important key. Staff development or building staff capacity is crucial. We are in the age of technology while much of our instruction is still in the age of industrialization. America's schools, the bedrock of our democracy, are in a struggle for their survival and we are a small part of that struggle. I believe that if organizations internalize the need to change, they have the capacity to change. Change we must.

I would have loved to come before you tonight and inform you that all of the pieces are in place and that our job was to consolidate and strengthen our gains. As you can understand, there are still pieces missing. Not everything we have done has met expectations.

I look forward to the coming year and I thank each of you for your input, your dedication, and your support. Our children deserve no less.